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TAGS: FUN PREL PGOV LG
SUBJECT: LATVIAN RESPONSE TO JANUARY 26-27 GAERC DEMARCHE

REF: STATE 4297

Classified By: Charge d' Affaires a.i. Bruce Rogers, for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Pol/Econ Off delivered reftel demarche to Kristaps Brusbardis, MFA's EU Correspondent, on January 22. He stated that the Western Balkans and Chad/Sudan would not be on the GAERC's agenda, and that the MFA has no immediate points on those issues. He noted Afghanistan may be discussed on the margins of the meeting, but that it was not a formal topic. He did add that on the issue of expanding EU troop deployments to Afghanistan, the EU was waiting for the Obama administration to take the lead on discussions.

¶2. (C) Brusbardis said the hardest topic at the GAERC for Latvia would be the issue of whether to invite Belarus President Lukashenka to the planned EU Eastern Partnership Summit during the Czech presidency. He said the GOL had no immediate position and that there are many legal and political factors that need to be analyzed. Not only are there visa ban list issues, he added, but that it is hard to predict what will be the state of Belarus politics by the time of the summit. Brusbardis said the MFA has heard through Moldovan officials that both Moldova and Belarus worry about Russia's response to the Eastern Partnership, and that Lukashenka may not be interested in attending given potential negative reactions from Moscow. He concluded that while much more EU discussion is needed, if in the end Lukashenka did attend, it is something the GOL could live with.

¶3. (C) On Ukraine/Russia, Brusbardis noted that while the gas conflict is formally a commercial issue, the political nature of the dispute cannot be denied. Latvia's position, he said, is that EU unity and common attitudes towards both Russia and Ukraine are essential, that transparency in the gas dealings must be improved, and that the EU needs to look for long-term solutions to cement energy security.

¶4. (C) Regarding Guantanamo detainee resettlement, he said that Latvia has no position at this time. He further noted that on the issue of whether there should be a common EU position on detainee resettlement, it is not clear if the EU has competence over the issue.

¶5. (C) On Zimbabwe, Brusbardis said that an extension of EU sanctions would be approved without Council discussion, and that Latvia supports extending those sanctions. Lastly, on the Middle East, he noted that the GOL's positions match the USG's closely, with Latvia welcoming the Gaza cease fire and Egyptian mediation, but urging that border control between Egypt and Gaza be strengthened in order to prevent weapons smuggling.

ROGERS